Remarks at the National Institutes of Health in Bethesda, Maryland

September 30, 2009

Thank you. Thank you so much. Francis, thank you for the extraordinary introduction. I want to echo what has just been said about my Secretary of HHS. She is, I just think, outstanding. She hit the ground running, and with all the burdens that she carries, she always has a sense of fun and energy and is just good to be around. So please give Kathleen Sebelius a big round of applause.

I want to acknowledge that we are in Congressman Chris Van Hollen's district, a Democrat from Maryland, and Chris is here and a great supporter of NIH historically. We are very grateful for him. And we are so happy to have Senator Arlen Specter, who is directly responsible for so much of the funding for NIH research. He is a huge champion for your cause. And I know you already gave him a round—rousing round of applause, but I just want to echo what a great job he's been doing and what a great partner he's been.

Finally, somebody who's not here but deserves a little credit is my Vice President, Joe Biden, who is managing the stimulus process——

[*At this point, there was a microphone feedback problem.*]

Whoa! That's Joe trying to call in. [*Laughter*] Joe is doing a great job and—but he is pretty tough when it comes to tracking the money, and so he's going to be paying attention—doc—[*laughter*]—to make sure that it's going where it's supposed to be going.

Before I begin my remarks about this extraordinary institution, I want to say a word about the tragic events that took place yesterday in America Samoa. My deepest sympathies are with the families who've lost loved ones and the many people whose lives have been affected by the earthquake and the tsunami. To aid in the response, I've declared this a major disaster to speed the deployment of resources. And FEMA, the Federal Emergency Management Agency, is working closely with emergency responders on the ground, and the Coast Guard is helping to provide immediate help to those in need. We also stand ready to help our friends in neighboring Samoa and throughout the region, and we'll continue to monitor the situation closely as we keep the many people who've been touched by this tragedy in our thoughts and in our prayers.

Now, today I'm here to talk about our Nation's commitment to research. I want to thank Dr. Collins and his team for showing me and Kathleen some of the extraordinary groundbreaking research being done at the National Institutes of Health. The work you do is not easy. It takes a great deal of patience and persistence. But it holds incredible promise for the health of our people and the future of our Nation and our world. That's why I'm here today.

For decades, the NIH has been at the forefront of medical invention and innovation, helping to save countless lives and relieve untold suffering. And yet, if we're honest, in recent years, we've seen our leadership slipping as scientific integrity was, at times, undermined and research funding failed to keep pace.

We know that the work you do would not get done if left solely to the private sector. Some research does not lend itself to quick profit. And that's why places like the NIH were founded.

And that's why my administration is making a historic commitment to research and the pursuit of discovery. And that's why today we're announcing that we've awarded $5 billion—that's with a "b"—in grants through the Recovery Act to conduct cutting-edge research all across America, to unlock treatments to diseases that have long plagued humanity, to save and enrich the lives of people all over the world. This represents the single largest boost to biomedical research in history.

Now, one of the most exciting areas of research to move forward as a result of this investment will be in applying what scientists have learned through the Human Genome Project to help us understand, prevent, and treat various forms of cancer, heart disease, and autism. And having been a leader of the Human Genome Project, Dr. Collins knows this promise all too well. And it's a promise that we've only just begun to realize.

In cancer, we're beginning to see treatments based on our knowledge of genetic changes that cause the disease and the genetic predispositions that many of us carry that make us more susceptible to the disease. But we've only scratched the surface of these kinds of treatments because we've only begun to understand the relationship between our environment and genetics in causing and promoting cancer.

So through the Recovery Act, the NIH is expanding the Cancer Genome Atlas, collecting more than 20,000 tissue samples to sequence the DNA of more than 20 types of cancer. And this has extraordinary potential to help us better understand and treat this disease. Cancer has touched the lives of all Americans, including my own family's; 1.5 million people will be diagnosed in the next year. Half a million people will lose their lives. We all know the terrible toll on families and the promise of treatments that will allow a mother to be there for her children as they grow up, that will make it possible for a child to reach adulthood, that will allow countless people to survive a disease that's claimed far too many lives.

Through these investments in research, we will also have the opportunity to make strides in the treatment and prevention of heart disease, the leading cause of death in the United States. Since 1948, for example, researchers have been following generations of residents in the town of Framingham, Massachusetts, to better understand the cause of cardiovascular illness. Now we have a chance to study the DNA of these participants and connect what we know after decades of observation to what we'll soon know about their genetic makeup. And perhaps we can identify those who are likely get high blood pressure or high cholesterol and find ways to intervene before heart disease even develops.

And finally, we'll also provide the largest ever infusion of funding into autism research. Across the country, grant recipients will have the opportunity to study genetic and environmental factors of a disease that now touches more than 1 in every 150 children. And what we learn will hopefully lead to greater understanding, early interventions, more effective treatments and therapies to help these children live their lives and achieve their fullest potential, which is extraordinary.

Now, we know that these investments in research will improve and save countless lives for generations to come. And as I was taking a tour with Dr. Collins and Dr. Fauci and others, just listening to the possibility of a HIV/AIDS vaccine, or hearing the latest treatments of cancer that allow people who previously only had resort to the most violent types of radiation or chemotherapy now being able to take pills and seeing extraordinary progress, it is something that is entirely inspiring. But we also know that these investments will save jobs, they'll create new jobs—tens of thousands of jobs—conducting research and manufacturing and supplying

medical equipment and building and modernizing laboratories and research facilities all across America.

And that's also what the Recovery Act is all about. It's not just about creating make-work jobs; it's about creating jobs that will make a lasting difference for our future. From the beginning, our goal has been to rescue the economy at the same time as we're laying a new foundation for lasting economic growth. And central to that foundation is a health care system that can deliver the treatments and cures you discover in an affordable way. After all, decades of research make no difference to the family that is dropped from an insurance policy when a child gets sick. And breakthroughs with the potential to save lives don't matter when your insurance doesn't cover a preexisting condition. And as costs rise and rise, that leaves less and less for the kinds of investments in health care and in basic research that will actually improve our well-being. That's why we're working so hard to pass long-overdue reforms.

Now, I should point out there are some who have opposed the reforms we're suggesting, saying it would lead to a takeover by the Government of the health care sector. But this concern about the involvement of Government, I should point out, has been present whenever we have sought to improve our health care system.

Here's an interesting quote from FDR—he addressed it nearly 70 years ago right here at the dedication of NIH. And he said, and I quote, "Neither the American people, nor their Government, intends to socialize medical practice any more than they plan to socialize industry. In American life, the family doctor, the general practitioner performs a service which we rely upon and which we trust as a nation, and there can be no substitute for the personal relationship between doctor and patient, which is a source of strength of [our] medical practice in our land."

FDR was being accused of a Government takeover of health care. [*Laughter*] But he thought NIH was a pretty good idea. And think about everything that's happened and all the lives that have been saved and all the progress that's been made and all the commercial activity that's been generated as a consequence of that early investment.

And these words are a reminder that while we've made great advances in medicine, our debates haven't always kept pace. And these words remind us that there have always been those who argued against progress, but that at our best, we've never allowed our fears to overwhelm our hopes for a brighter future.

That's been at the heart of the work of the National Institutes of Health for decades. It was here that Dr. Roy Hertz would develop the first successful cure of metastatic cancer through chemotherapy, as a group of women, who would have surely died, began actually to get better. It was here that Dr. Nina Braunwald, the first woman ever to be board-certified in cardiothoracic surgery, conducted some of the earliest operations to replace heart valves. It was here, in the years after President Roosevelt's visit, that polio vaccines would be tested to end a scourge that affected millions, including, obviously, the President that helped to make the research possible.

We can only imagine the new discoveries that will flow from the investments we make today. Breakthroughs in medical research take far more than the occasional flash of brilliance, as important as that can be. Progress takes time; it takes hard work; it can be unpredictable; it can require a willingness to take risks—going down some blind alleys occasionally. Figuring out what doesn't work is sometimes as important as figuring out what does. All of this needs the

support of Government. It holds promise like no other area of human endeavor, but we've got to make a commitment to it.

And here at the National Institutes of Health, and at universities and research institutions across this country, you are demonstrating our capacity not just as a nation but as human beings to harness our creativity and our ingenuity to save lives, to spare suffering, to build a better world for ourselves, our children, and our grandchildren. That is our great promise, and it is one that we've once again begun to fulfill.

So thank you for your extraordinary work. And we are going to keep on providing the support that you need. The American people are looking forward to the next set of discoveries that all of you are working on today.

Thank you so much.

NOTE: The President spoke at 11:03 a.m. In his remarks, he referred to Francis S. Collins, Director, National Institutes of Health; and Anthony S. Fauci, Director, National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases.

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